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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 002172

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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/IRAQ: BOT VISITS BAGHDAD, PUSHES FOR GREATER EU ROLE

REF: THE HAGUE 1935

Classified By: POLCOUNS ANDREW J. SCHOFER FOR REASONS 1.4(B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Dutch Foreign Minister Bot's November 29 visit to Iraq will hopefully spur the EU to take a more active role in Iraq, according to an MFA interlocutor who participated in the trip. An EU "exploratory commission" tasked with developing concrete proposals for supporting reconstruction and security in Iraq traveled to Iraq with Bot; its preliminary findings will be briefed to the upcoming Gymnich (informal) meeting of EU foreign ministers. Bot reportedly was favorably impressed by his Iraqi contacts, especially PM Allawi, whom Bot invited to address the EU Council meeting in November. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On August 31, Michiel den Hond, Director of the Dutch MFA's Office of North African and Middle Eastern Affairs, briefed POLCOUNS on Foreign Minister Bernard Bot's August 29 visit to Baghdad. According to den Hond, the short visit (six hours, all in the "green zone") succeeded in its prime objective of encouraging the EU to take a more active, constructive role in Iraq. Den Hond identified the areas in which the EU could play a useful role as: election support; rule of law; civil administration; and security (including police training).

¶3. (C) Bot traveled to Iraq with an EU "exploratory commission" chaired by Dutch MFA Deputy Political Director Hermann Schaaper (reftel) and including representatives of the European Commission and European Council Secretariat. This commission is tasked with assessing where and how the EU should concentrate its efforts most effectively and developing specific recommendations. Den Hond noted that while the EU had agreed in July to take a more "positive" approach to Iraq, the European Commission and Council Secretariat had been reluctant to travel to Iraq or even do a

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practical assessment until Bot's trip. By accompanying the exploratory commission personally to Baghdad, he noted, Bot gave it political credibility and also a sense of urgency. The commission remained in Iraq for three days and is expected to report its preliminary findings to the September 3-4 Gymnich meeting. Den Hond observed that even if the exploratory commission is not prepared to issue a formal report at the Gymnich, Bot would be prepared to present his own "informal" views and recommendations on the basis of his visit and readouts from Dutch participants.

¶4. (C) Den Hond said that Bot had been very favorably impressed by his Iraqi interlocutors, which included PM Allawi, President Al-Yawar, and Foreign Minister Zebari. (Bot also met UN representative Mountain.) Allawi in particular appeared to be comfortable in his role as a self-assured "man of power" who intended to realize Iraq's full potential, den Hond said. Den Hond added that while it was encouraging to see Iraqis taking charge of their own country, some of Iraq's neighbors might not view Allawi's ambitions so favorably. The EU, he said, was already beginning to work with neighboring states to minimize such concerns and encourage regional cooperation. Bot formally invited Allawi to attend the European Council meeting on November 5. Den Hond said that Allawi's anticipated presence at this meeting would hopefully spur the EU to move quickly to formalize its program for supporting Iraqi reconstruction.

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